

# *GLoucester Street History Group, Winchcombe – A Progress Report*

*by Rob White*

## *FIRST STEPS*

The Gloucester Street History Group was formed in 1990 following a short course on the history of Winchcombe by Bryan Jerrard. Several of the course members had a particular interest in Gloucester Street and were keen to find out more. Whilst the objective of the Group was (rather loosely) to simply find out more about the pre 20th century owners and occupiers of Gloucester Street, it soon became clear that to begin with there were two main strands of research to pursue:

### *1 Linking the occupiers in the censuses*

Some years earlier an attempt had been made to link the first five censuses (1841, 51, 61, 71, 81) for Gloucester Street but there had been few points of similarity and too many places where the censuses didn't fit at all. Now, by using the 1850 Rate Book<sup>1</sup> as a starting point it was possible to see some clear links between the censuses helped by landmarks in the street like Church Cottage, the Lodging House, Gloucester House, and the 19th century public houses (The Unicorn, Corner Cupboard, Upper Packhorse, and Lower Packhorse), some of which had not been clearly marked by the census enumerator but could be surmised by reference to the householder's occupation, for example, beerhouse keeper. The poor fit of the earlier attempt to link the censuses had probably been due in large part to occasions when two families (not necessarily related) shared one house but this had not been made clear by the census enumerator, and also where a house had been divided into two properties between censuses. By referring to title deeds that gradually came to light it was possible to learn the names of neighbouring owners and occupiers which helped to dovetail the censuses together.

### *2 Constructing Family Units*

Since it was likely that ownership of some of the Gloucester Street properties had remained within the same families for several generations it was necessary to extract details from the wills of 19th century proprietors<sup>2</sup>, using the ownership details from the 1850 Rate Book as a starting point. Some wills contained the briefest of information about bequests, not least when the testator left '...all my worldly goods to my dear wife...' which may or may not have included property. Other wills contained a wealth of detail, a good example being that of Ann Hall, a widow who in 1815 bequeathed her nine houses (six of them in Gloucester Street) to seven of her nephews and nieces - Ann presumably being childless - none of whom were born with the name Hall. Two other notable testators were Sarah Hughes, widow, who bequeathed 12 houses, all in Gloucester Street, to her eight children in 1825, and William Hall who bequeathed 16 houses (11 of them in Gloucester Street) to six of his children in 1852.

The next step was to construct outline family trees for the owners of these Gloucester Street properties. Through intermarriage, links became apparent with Gloucester Street occupiers plus other proprietors. To date the GSHG has the

details of 92 wills and 12 Admons on file, and 46 family trees have been constructed.

## *FURTHER SOURCES*

Gradually more source information came to light, the most significant of which were three more documents which provided details of the owners and occupiers (heads of household) of each property in Gloucester Street, viz:

1914 Valuation<sup>3</sup>

1805 Valuation<sup>4</sup>

1775 Poor List<sup>5</sup>

The 1914 Valuation contained modern-day house numbers (the earliest source document to do so) whereas neither the 1805 Valuation or the 1775 Poor List gave any indication as to which part of the document was Gloucester Street. Fortunately by this stage sufficient title deeds had been scrutinised to establish by deduction which parts of the 1805 and 1775 lists related to Gloucester Street.

Additional information came to light, firstly from the six Court Leet lists<sup>6</sup> (1789 to 1803) of (adult male) occupiers, some but not all of which were listed under street names, plus further Poor Lists of 1774 and 1759<sup>7</sup> which gave the names of proprietors and occupiers but omitted the streets.

Other source information was not so useful. It was hoped that the Land Tax Assessments of 1821 and 1831 would help to bridge the gap between the 1805 Valuation and the 1841 census. However, although both LTAs listed occupiers and proprietors the houses were clearly not in consecutive order and this source was therefore of limited value.

## *TITLE DEEDS*

Thirty sets of title deeds for Gloucester Street have been seen to date, mostly borrowed from present day owners but some were chanced upon in the Gloucestershire Record Office, usually as part of a larger deposit by a solicitor or landowner. Most of the deeds were relatively straightforward to understand but a few proved difficult to follow and some did not always tie in with others in the same bundle. Two sets of deeds clearly contained indentures that didn't belong, presumably having been mixed up when stored, perhaps in a solicitor's office, and these odd indentures were subsequently traced to the opposite side of Gloucester Street!

The acquisition of information from title deeds has enabled 'house biographies' to be prepared, each of which shows the history of ownership and occupation, primarily culled from the deeds and supplemented with details from the other sources, for example, wills, censuses, and so on. An example is shown at Fig A for 23 Gloucester Street (better known as the Winchcombe Railway Museum).

DATE	OWNED BY	SOURCE	OCCUPIER
1810	Thos Arkell Sold to William Best	Title deeds	
1841		Census	William Best and Hetty Jones (sister)
1849	William Best died passed to Hetty Jones (sister)	WB will TD; will proved	William Best
1850	Exec of late Mr Best	Rates Book	Unoccupied
1851		Census	James & Mary Ann Wells
1856	Hetty Jones died passed to Ann Clark (formerly Driscoll, previously Preeedy)	TD	
1861		Census	Martha Rowland
1871		Census	Frederick & Charlotte White
1881		Census	George & Esther Belcher
1889	Daniel & Ann Clark sold to Samuel Hall	TD	Richard Laight
1891		Census	William & Mary Hall
1909	Samuel Hall sold to Amos Hall	TD	Samuel Hall ("for many years")
1914	Amos Hall	Valuation	Samuel Hall

Fig A

An attempt was then made to fit the various listings and pieces of information together in the form of a matrix which included:

Poor Rate List	1775
Court Leet lists	1789-1803
Valuation	1805
Rate Book	1850
Censuses	1841-1891
Valuation	1914

At first this met with only partial success because of the variation over time in the number of houses in the street. Nevertheless, the 'matrix showed the pattern of occupation and ownership of specific houses over several generations as well as highlighting the problems. It also assisted in illustrating significant changes, for example, where three houses in the 1805 Valuation were subsequently demolished to make way for the construction of the Vicarage a few years later. Although initially prepared manually the matrix was later entered onto a computer spreadsheet (covering the equivalent of four A3 sheets in a rectangular format) to facilitate easy updating and the correction of errors. It was subsequently exported to a more sophisticated software application to enable the X and Y axes to be transposed and the X axis then reversed so that the details in the matrix matched a frieze of photographs of all the houses on each side of the street. Part of the final version is shown at Fig B.

### THE FOCUS WIDENS

Whilst the main interest of the Gloucester Street History Group has naturally been the (approximately) 140 houses in the street, in due course more and more information came to light about Winchcombe which was also of interest, sometimes because it included former Gloucester Street occupiers and

proprietors (for example, the survey of Winchcombe churchyard which GSHG members have almost completed), or because it involved someone connected with Gloucester Street, like Dennis Trenfield who in 1835 sold part of his land (the former Abbey grounds) in order to allow the widening of the road near the eastern end of Gloucester Street<sup>8</sup>, which led to a change in its name from Bearport Street to Abbey Terrace.

After a while it gradually became clear that collecting source information about Winchcombe people would yield at least some details relating to Gloucester Street. As a result information from the Winchcombe Parish Registers has been collected, initially the printed records (pre 1812) originally published by Phillimore, with post 1812 events now being transcribed onto computer. Winchcombe wills have been noted regardless of whether they included bequests of Gloucester Street properties. Census details collected were originally restricted to Gloucester Street but subsequently the details for the whole of Winchcombe came to hand for 1841, and information from the 1881 census index (part of the National 1881 Census Project) may be obtained in due course. In addition, two original documents have been transcribed onto computer, one being the handwritten autobiography of Arthur Shekell<sup>9</sup> who for 60 years was the proprietor of the West End Stores in Gloucester Street, and the other a recent school project<sup>10</sup> on the licensed premises of Winchcombe in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

### PUTTING SOME FLESH ON THE BONES

Occasionally a document was chanced upon that opened up a rich seam of information which would otherwise have been very difficult to find. One such item was a newspaper advertisement in 1858<sup>11</sup> for several properties, including three

Fig. B. GLOUCESTER STREET: NORTH SIDE (extract)

NO/NAME.	25	23	21	19
1775 OCC				
1775 PROP				
1789 OCC			55 Mece Wm	
1790 OCC			58 Mece Wm	
1791 OCC			52 Mece Wm	
1795 OCC			58 Mece Wm	
1799 OCC			49 Mece Wm	48 Herris Richd
1803 OCC			20 Mece Wm	25 Willett Joseph
1806 OCC	17 Hall Samuel	16 Reynolds Mery	15 Ballinger Edmund	14 Herris Richd
1806 PROP	17 GREENING JOHN	16 ARKELL THOS	15 BALLINGER EDMUNO	14 BALLINGER EOMUNO
1841 OCC	34 Hell John/Mery	35 Best William	36 Hunt William/Alice	37 Wilson George/Mary
1850 OCC	17 Hall George	16 void	15 Ballenger Edmund	14 Lenk Lydia
1850 PROP	17 HARTLAND NATHANIEL	16 BEST MR (EXEC)	15 BALLINGER EDMUNO	14 BALLENGER EOMUND
1851 OCC	54 Hall George/Emme	55 Wells James/Mery Ann	56 Ballenger Edmund/Lydie	57 Wilson George/Mery
1861 OCC	18 Hell John wid	17 Rowland Martha	16 Timbrell George/Amy	15 Wilson George/Mery
1871 OCC	16 Silver Josiah/Emily	15 White Frederick/Charlotte	14 Noakes Philip/Ann	13 Ballinger Thomas/Ann
1881 OCC	17 Silver Josiah/Abigail	16 Belcher George/Esther	15 Noakes Philip/Ann	14 Ballinger Thos/Elize
1891 OCC	16 Day Emme wid	15 Hall William/Mary	14 Noakes Ann	13 Bostock John/Elize
1910 OCC	25 Day E Mr	23 Hall Samuel Mr	21 Bartlett Mr	19 Hicks Mr
1910 PROP	25 DAY EDWARD	23 HALL AMOS MR	21 MORRIS EMMA MRS	19 MORRIS EMMA MRS
NO/NAME.	25	23	21	19

Gloucester Street houses, which were 'to be preemptorily sold by auction'. This unusual description prompted a search in the *Gloucester Journal* covering a period of some nine months in 1858/59 which led to the discovery that the auction was for the sale of the property of Dennis Trenfield (see above), a bankrupt and former solicitor of Winchcombe who had been convicted of forgery and sentenced to ten years transportation after surviving a suicide attempt when 'half of his face was shot away'. The newspaper articles concerned covered a period of some seven months and gave graphic details of the attempted suicide and the circumstances of the forgeries. Even the local Vicar, who resided at the Gloucester Street Vicarage, was implicated in the

affair and languished for several months in the debtors' prison at Gloucester before being sentenced to nine months imprisonment<sup>12</sup>, after which he returned to his role as Vicar of Winchcombe.

were both dead, a witness reporting that Fawdry had cut his wife's throat with a butcher's knife and then turned the weapon on himself with fatal effect<sup>14</sup>. Evidence at the inquest indicated that Fawdry's mind had been unbalanced for several years.



Fig C. Gloucester Street, Winchcombe at the turn of the century

### *THREE LOCAL MURDERS*

Newspapers also gave full accounts of the three Winchcombe murders and provided much contemporary colour. Richard Smith, the owner of Gloucester House in Gloucester Street, was charged with the murder of his wife in December 1864 at their house in North Street. There was little doubt that he had killed her with his shotgun but his mind was unbalanced and he was committed to the Asylum at Gloucester after being found not guilty of murder<sup>13</sup>. At the trial several illustrations of Smith's insanity were cited by witnesses, for example, fishing in the road with a rod and line, trying to hitch a lift with the Bishop who was on his way to Sudeley Castle, asking a gentleman to take his horse to a public house and give him a brandy, and 'walking about the streets of Winchcombe strangely dressed and without a portion of his clothes - without his collar and necktie' (!), and it was stated that other members of his family had also been mad.

At the outbreak of the First World War Edward Day, miller and baker of 25 Gloucester Street, owned more houses in the street than anyone else, and three years later in May 1917 his niece, Elizabeth Matthews, married Frederick Fawdry, a local butcher, after a courtship of some 13 years. Less than 24 hours later they

The third murder was in 1904 when Thomas Wallins, who was lodging in Hailes Street, cut the throat of his landlady's daughter, Louisa Bingham, apparently in a fit of passion, and then dispatched himself by the same means<sup>15</sup>. Both victims were from Birmingham.

### *THE RAILWAY ACCIDENT*

Another incident, equally horrifying, was the Railway Viaduct disaster at nearby Stanway Grounds on Friday 13 November 1903. The viaduct, which was part of the new Cheltenham to Honeybourne line, was in the course of construction when, after heavy rain, three arches collapsed killing four men and seriously injuring six others, one of whom, Frank Griffin, had a remarkable escape. He was on the arch which first fell (on which a steam crane was positioned) and feeling that it was collapsing tried to escape. Amidst the falling masonry he seized the iron water pipe which ran along the top of the bridge and hung on to it, being suspended in the air for some time. Then the pipe broke in the middle and he dropped thirty feet into the debris below. He was then picked up injured and placed for safety under the adjoining arch which almost immediately afterwards collapsed, though not before giving warning by the fall of a few bricks, and Griffin had only just been transferred to the open field before

his first resting place was bestrewn with masonry<sup>16</sup>.

At the inquest the subcontractor for the brickwork declared that the mortar used in the construction of the arches was 'the best that has ever been made'. However, the foreman of the jury, John Oakey, a local builder who lived at Balloon House in Gloucester Street and who was notable for the publication of his memories of Winchcombe some thirty years later<sup>17</sup>, had surreptitiously taken a sample of the mortar during an official visit to the site, and was of the view that 'there was no sign of (the mortar) setting nor there never will be'. Oakey's view was supported by another member of the jury but the Coroner said "I don't think we need worry ourselves as to whether it was good or bad mortar. One might pick up a bit on the spot without knowing where it came from and for this reason be unable to judge the general quality". Although the verdict of the jury was accidental death they considered that insufficient time was allowed for the mortar to set, that cement mortar rather than lime mortar should have been used, and that the steam crane should not have been allowed so far along the centre of the first arch<sup>18</sup>.

### *OTHER INCIDENTS*

There were a surprising number of instances of local shopkeepers and traders who took court proceedings against their customers over unpaid debts. In the majority of cases either the plaintiff was successful or the case was withdrawn, presumably because the debt was settled at the last minute.

The largest property holder in Gloucester Street in 1850 was William Hall (see above) who owned 11 houses. He was a master plasterer who some 35-40 years before had founded a public house, The Plasterers Arms, in nearby Bearport Street. In 1983 two books of his were discovered in the roofspace of the Plasterers Arms when a local builder was renovating the property. The books were carefully examined and transcribed<sup>19</sup> and contain much information of interest about early 19th C Winchcombe. The first book was for Work Accounts covering the period 1817-1828 and mention is made of several Gloucester Street properties including some tenants of Mrs Timbrell and of Mr Hughes of the Packhorse. The second book is a Beerhouse book listing customers who presumably owed money having purchased beer, tobacco and sometimes newspapers on tick in 1836-37; on occasion even money was lent.

### *FUTURE RESEARCH*

After nearly five years the enthusiasm of GSHG members is undiminished, indeed if anything it is greater than ever. In April 1995 a display of our findings was undertaken as part of the Winchcombe Museum Open Day using the various talents of GSHG members and helped to gain a lot of local interest.

At present we have a number of half finished projects nearing completion, plus the ongoing updating of the matrix, but what then?

Most local historians will acknowledge that a project is never fully completed because there is always more information waiting to be found, and that is certainly true of Winchcombe despite the absence of any local maps prior to the 1880s. The earliest source document mentioned above is the 1759 Poor List, but a series of 34 more Poor Lists was later found stretching from 1673 to 1769<sup>20</sup>, and gleaning the Gloucester Street

information from these will give us a greater insight into the few 17th and 18th title deeds that we have copies of. Also, 19th century log books for Dent's school in Gloucester Street are still in existence and will hopefully provide much useful information, as will the (mainly 19th century) information from Lady Juliana Tracy's ancient charity, which details the 40 local recipients (20 women and 20 men) of gowns and coats distributed to the poor each Boxing Day. In addition, 58 prisoners from Winchcombe have been found in the early 19th century registers of Gloucester Gaol, all of whom were tried at Gloucester Assizes and 11 transported to Australia.

The part of Gloucester Street west of Malthouse Lane, which is in the old hamlet of Coates, has proved difficult to get to grips with, not least since the 19th century census enumerators varied their routes in this area, and also because many 18th century and early 19th century source documents did not include these houses. Hopefully more light will be shone on this part of Gloucester Street in the future.

It is hoped that at some stage our detailed findings will be published, but the hardest part may be knowing when to stop the research. Much knowledge and information about Winchcombe has been collected and we would be happy to pass this on to anyone contemplating the history of other parts of Winchcombe.

NOTE: The members of the Gloucester Street History Group are Marion Allen, Zoe Bridges, John Brooks, Pat Christie, Mike Oliver, Janet and Tim Petchey, Alastair and Ruth Robinson, Ralph Wade, Sue Waind, Sue Wall and Rob White.

Ref: GLST2

### *REFERENCES*

- 1 Gloucestershire Record Office: P368/OV1/27
- 2 Copies of most Winchcombe wills are contained in the GRO.
- 3 Finance Act 1910 ( Duties on Land Values). Original documents stored in Gloucester Shirehall (Modern Records Dept), ref CROE 5289.
- 4 GRO: P368/VE1/1
- 5 GRO: P368 OV1
- 6 GRO: D2579M
- 7 GRO: P368 OV1
- 8 GRO: Q/SH 1835 B3
- 9 Courtesy of Dorothy Lebourgeois, daughter of Arthur Shekell.
- 10 By Elizabeth Lainé in 1987 then aged 13.
- 11 *Gloucester Journal*: 24 April 1858
- 12 *Ibid* 18 September 1858
- 13 Both *Gloucester Journal* and *Evesham Journal*: 8 April 1865
- 14 Both *Gloucs Chronicle* and *Gloucester Journal*: 19 May 1917
- 15 *Ibid*: 18 June 1904
- 16 *Gloucester Journal*: 21 November 1903
- 17 John A Oakey, "Reminiscences of Winchcombe" 1935-6.
- 18 *Gloucester Journal*: 28 November 1903.
- 19 Transcribed by Anthony G J Evans of London, a descendant of William Hall.
- 20 GRO: P368 OV1 and CW1